

**The Rise of Cultural Economy on Netflix:
A Study of A Successful Story of Squid Game**

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Submitted to the Faculty of
Department of International Affairs in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs

Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages
2023

WENZAO URSULINE UNIVERSITY OF LANGAUGES
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2023

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ABSTRACT

I want to focus on the most popular episodes on Netflix, which shows the rise of global cultural economy. That is related to over-the-top media services (OTT) that has gradually become a trendy way of life for modern people. The use of OTT is convenient, particularly due to the impact of COVID-19, with increasing subscribers. Netflix has been one of the most popular streaming platforms, serving more than 190 regions and countries. It is a “Content Provider” but also a “Content Production” for its own platform. The original series “Squid game” became the Most Viewed Original Series on Netflix. Whether it is in the news, social media, or walking on the street, has been the frequent mention of “Squid game”. The purpose of this study is mainly to explore the role of Netflix in the success of the “Squid Game” with a study on the factors of the success of “Squid game”. This study explores thoughts and ideas about this series through in-depth interviews with Netflix subscribers who have watched “Squid Game”. Besides, I also do my research through secondary sources of directors and actors represented in mass media.

Keywords: Netflix, Squid Game, Cultural Economy

Netflix 文化經濟的崛起：《魷魚遊戲》成功故事的研究

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摘要

我想關注在 Netflix 上最受歡迎的影集，這部影集展示了全球文化經濟的崛起。這個文化經濟現象，與串流媒體影音服務逐漸成為現代人流行的生活方式有關。消費者享用便利的串流媒體服務，尤其受到 COVID-19 的影響，訂閱者逐漸增加。Netflix 已成為最受歡迎的串流媒體平台之一，它服務於 190 多個地區和國家。它既是「內容提供者」，又是自身平台的「內容生產者」。《魷魚遊戲》已成為 Netflix 上觀看次數最多的原創影集。無論是新聞、社交媒體上，還是走在大街上，都經常提及《魷魚遊戲》。本研究的目的主要是透過對《魷魚遊戲》成功因素的研究，探討 Netflix 在《魷魚遊戲》成功中的角色。本研究透過對觀看過《魷魚遊戲》的幾位 Netflix 訂閱戶進行深度訪談，探討關於該影集的想法。此外，我還通過大眾媒體中導演和演員的二手資料進行研究。

關鍵字：Netflix、魷魚遊戲、文化經濟

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

The rise of contemporary cultural economy is a combination of the digital platforms and content providers. For example, OTT, Over The Top Media Service, is a popular concept of streaming media service provided directly to viewers via the Internet.¹ OTT typically monetizes through paid subscriptions. After 2005, various video streaming platforms on the Internet began to rise, including YouTube and Netflix.² The video streaming platform enables audiences to turn on the streaming media platform to watch the series or movies at any time. Viewers are no longer limited to a fixed time through traditional TV. Video streaming platforms provide viewers with more contents to watch than traditional TV. For viewers, the cost burden is lower, and cultural products can be consumed wherever there is an internet connection. Due to the rapid development of OTT, viewers have significantly reduced their dependence on traditional TV. The audience's viewing habits are also gradually changing, and the traditional TV industry is already facing the impact of operations. In recent years, due to the impact of COVID-19, one can see the rise of cultural economy throughout the world, like OTT subscribers have risen rapidly. So far, one of the most popular paid subscription video streaming platforms is Netflix.

The original mode of operation was that subscribers subscribe to rent video tapes and DVDs online. However, with the popularity of the Internet, Netflix realized that Internet streaming is the mainstream of the future. In 2007, Netflix officially launched its online viewing service and shifted its focus from DVD rentals to online

¹ "Ott/over the Top | Definition," <https://www.adjust.com/glossary/ott-over-the-top/>.

² Ipsos, "打敗傳統電視，異軍突起的串流影音平台！," <https://www.ipsos.com/en-tw/dabaichuantongdianshiyijuntuqidechuanliuyingyinpingtai>.

viewing services.³ Netflix's streaming platform serves more than 190 regions and countries. And Netflix entered the Taiwan market in 2016. But the rise of OTT may also change some the production of traditional cultural industries, such as movie theaters. Especially as the world is affected by the pandemic, movies off the big screen in cinemas may be released on OTT platforms again. In addition, the OTT platform is mainly not limited by space and time. Some viewers may prefer not to go to the cinemas for consumption and can watch movies at home. But according to Yang Meng-Ying, director of the Kaohsiung Film Museum, OTT and movie theaters may also be a mutual aid relationship. From 2020 to 2021, with the help of OTT, national films have an increasing trend. In 2021, the box office even rose to 35%, which is the highest point ever made.⁴

Netflix not only provides viewers with a wealth of video content in many different regions and countries, but also launches a number of programs exclusively distributed on its own platform. Netflix has been successful thanks to its original content. From “House of Cards” to “Squid Game”, the Netflix original shows spark a buzz surrounding the world. According to Netflix, "Squid Game" reached a staggering 1.65 billion hours viewing in the 28 days following its September 17th premiere.⁵ The content of the “Squid Game” is outlined as 456 players who are desperate for life and owe a lot of debt, participate in a series of deadly games in order to win 45.6 billion South Korean won. Regarding the plot of survival game, some viewers think that the theme is very novel, but some viewers who have watched similar themes think that the script is suspected of plagiarism. But it is undeniable that the artistic effects or

³ Christopher McFadden, "The Fascinating History of Netflix," <https://interestingengineering.com/the-fascinating-history-of-netflix>.

⁴ 盧亞蘭 王縈緹, "在人手一機的 Netflix 時代, 你還願意花錢進戲院嗎?," <https://sunrisemedium.com/p/88/the-future-of-cinema-and-ott>.

⁵ Joan E. Solsman, "Netflix's Squid Game Was Even Bigger Than You Thought -- 2.1b Hours Big," <https://www.cnet.com/culture/entertainment/netflix-squid-game-is-even-bigger-than-you-thought-2-billion-hours-big/>.

scene design of this drama are very attractive. The “Squid Game” once topped the Netflix charts in 90 different countries around the world.⁶ “Squid Game” is officially Netflix’s most watched show or film ever.⁷

Motivation

With the advancement of technology, the audience's viewing habits have gradually changed, because there are varieties of contents from traditional media like TV to new ones via Internet. During the severe pandemic in Taiwan last year, I also became a Netflix subscriber. Netflix becomes a good tool for leisure and entertainment. Netflix releases about 60 original movies and original series every month. The “Squid Game” was in the TOP 10 on Netflix chart in more than 90 countries during its broadcast. Based on recommendations from the Netflix charts and the constant mention of “Squid Game” on social media, I also watched the original series “Squid Game”, which was Netflix's *Most Viewed Original Series*. I often see information related to “Squid Game”. And what is the role of Netflix in the successes of “Squid Game”? These sparked my curiosity, so I started looking for materials related to Netflix, squid games, etc., and started this research.

Research Purpose

Netflix no doubt became a part of worldwide cultural economy. And “Squid Game” is the most watched original series on Netflix. The purpose of this study is to explore the way in which Netflix contribute to the success of the “Squid Game”. I

⁶ Paul Tassi, "‘Squid Game’ Is Now the #1 Show in 90 Different Countries," <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paultassi/2021/10/03/squid-game-is-now-the-1-show-in-90-different-countries/?sh=2a62e19e4d9e>.

⁷ Tim Gallagher, "Squid Game Ranked Most-Watched Show on Netflix Ever," <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2021/11/17/squid-game-ranked-most-watched-show-on-netflix-ever>.

want to study how this OTT service company (Netflix) has come into being an empire of cultural economy. Besides the Netflix, the research helps me understand other factors that contribute to the success of the “Squid Game”.

Research Question

- Leading Question:

What is the role of Netflix in the success of Squid game?

- Related Question:

Why is “Squid Game” so popular around the world?

Limits

The first challenge I face is the empirical ways to collect the primary source of interview with the director and actors of “Squid game”. This shows how difficult to get access to the elite-like interviewees. Thus, the interviews with the director and actors of the “Squid game” can only be collected through secondary sources of preceding interview data, and the data within media. The second challenge is the age of my interviewees was between 20~25 years old, I did not collect the thoughts and ideas of the wider samples.

Delimits

Although the secondary sources of interview data for the director and actors of "Squid Game" are limited, the questions and answers of the secondary sources of interview data are even more sufficient. The media analysis is therefore and useful for me answer my research questions.

CHAPTER2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this Chapter, there are four parts, which show the research background, concepts, and theories to do with this paper. The first part is the development of Internet, including the convergence of traditional media and new media. Second part is the growth of cultural economy in the case of Netflix, which develops from a DVD rental company to the global leader in streaming services. Next, the third part is about rise of the creative industries of South Korea that has become a cultural powerhouse. And the last part is about “Squid Game”: a Netflix drama.

The Development of the Internet

In recent years, with the development of Internet technology, traditional media have gradually been impacted by new media. Robert Elliot Kahn and Vint Cerf are famous scientists who invented the Internet. In 1973, they jointly proposed TCP (Transmission-Control Protocol) /IP (Internet Protocol), which is a protocol that provides information on the Internet connection between two devices. By now, almost all network usage is through the TCP/IP protocol.

Traditional Media and New Media

Traditional media regularly releases information or entertainment to the public through mechanical devices, which may be limited in time and space. Such as television, radio, newspapers and magazines and other traditional media.⁸ In addition, new media usually refers to the use of digital technology, network technology and other modern information technology, and it is not limited by space and time. New media involve social media, apps, and Video Sharing Platforms, etc.

⁸ Megha Shah, "Traditional Media Vs. New Media: Which Is Beneficial," <https://www.techfunnel.com/martech/traditional-media-vs-new-media-beneficial/>.

According to different theorists, the cognition of traditional and new media is also different. Paul Levinson⁹, an American media theorist, divides media into three types: traditional media, new media, and new new media. Traditional media include newspapers, magazines, radio and television, etc. It is usually produced and disseminated by professionals and released at a specific time. New media is defined as the first generation medium of the Internet, such as e-mail. People can send out information at times that is convenient for them to use the Internet. The definition of new *new media* is the second generation of Internet media, such as Twitter, YouTube and Wikipedia. Most of the content is not produced by professionals. Anyone can decide what to express based on their interests and talents, and usually this medium is free. In the past, traditional media tended to be produced content and information by producers so that audience could only receive it in one direction. And new media mainly needs to understand what the audience wants to see, and the producers make up the ideas and programs. Paul Levinson, an American media theorist believes that whether it is traditional media, new media or new *new media*, there is an implicit social function, providing a platform for people to interact, and the difference is only in the conditions of the way of interaction. The introduction of new *new media* highlights the changes in medium. With the development of technology, more possibilities for future media can be accommodated.

The Progress of OTT Media Service

GWI, an audience targeting company founded by Tom Smith in 2009, shows that the “typical” global internet user spends nearly 7 hours a day. While TV’s overall share of our daily media activity has declined, OTT media services like Netflix are taking an increasing share of our TV viewing time.

⁹ Paul Levinson, *New New Media* (Pearson, 2014/11/25).

Netflix was founded in 1997 when it began selling and renting DVDs to customers by mail. Two years later, Netflix began offering a monthly online subscription service over the Internet. More than a decade later, it became the leader in OTT space. The rapid digitization of services has led to an increasing adoption of OTT platforms. OTT has gradually become a way of life for modern people, just like the days of traditional TV in the past. The convenience offered by OTT platforms makes it easy to sell services to people who like to consume content online. And even the latest trend shaping the future of the industry is CTV. CTV, also known as “Connected TV”, refers to devices that allow TVs to connect to the Internet and watch OTT streaming content.¹⁰

The Development of Netflix

Michael Wolff, a well-known American journalist, according to his book *Television Is the New Television* mentioned that “Netflix was the first successful seller of content in the digital world. It proved the subscription model.” And Wolff mentioned another point, “*The challenge for television is not the Netflix model; rather, the challenge for Netflix is to figure out how to adopt more of a television model.*”¹¹ In other words, Netflix can become television, like CTV. Wolff argues that Netflix is more like TV than the internet, because it shuns many of the interactive affordances of internet media in favor of established narrative structures, aesthetics, and experiences. Television as discourse has been very flexible in accommodating technologies, industrial changes, or changes in the social practices in the history of the medium.

¹⁰ Saravanan Jayavelu, "The Detailed Evolution of Ott Platforms Which Spans a Decade," <https://50wheel.com/the-detailed-evolution-of-ott-platforms-which-spans-a-decade/>.

¹¹ Michael Wolff, *Television Is the New Television :The Unexpected Triumph of Old Media in the Digital Age* (2015).

The Growth of Netflix

Reed Hastings and Marc Rudolph founded Netflix in California in 1997. At the time, Netflix was just a DVD rental company. In 1998, the original business model is to provide customers with online rental and delivery to the door. But a year later, Netflix launched an online subscription model, and the operating model changed from a pay-per-view to a fixed monthly fee. Netflix offered customers unlimited DVD rentals with no expiration date, overdue fees and monthly rental limits.¹² In 2000, a personalized movie recommendation system was introduced, which highlighted more future choices based on ratings given by members in the past. Netflix improves the user experience by using the Cinematch ranking algorithm. The more user ratings, the more accurately the system will predict future choices.

At the end of 2006, Netflix had more than 6.3 million subscribers. The DVD market shrank by 4.5 percent in 2007, the first decline in a decade. While Netflix's DVD rental business was growing and generating revenue, Hastings and his team knew it wouldn't last long. With the popularity of the Internet and the increase in bandwidth, Netflix realized that the Internet and streaming media were the future. Hence, Netflix launched its online streaming service in 2007. In 2008, Netflix partnered with some electronics brands to allow streaming on TV set-top boxes. From 2009 to 2011, Netflix subscribers soared from 12 million to 26 million. And Netflix separates DVD rentals from streaming services. Subscribing to the two services separately increased by 50% over the original total price, which made subscribers very dissatisfied. In September 2011, Starz TV, which authorized Netflix to provide Disney and SONY contents, announced that it would stop working with Netflix. Therefore, Netflix realized that streaming video media was not feasible without

¹² Marjolein Oomen, "Netflix: How a Dvd Rental Company Changed the Way We Spend Our Free Time," <https://www.businessmodelsinc.com/exponential-business-model/netflix/>.

content.

Netflix is not only a “Content Provider” but also a “Content Production” for its own platform.

Netflix's first original series, “House of Cards”, was released in 2013. The definition of a “Netflix Original” is divided into the following categories: Netflix commissioned and produced the show. Netflix owned the international exclusive rights to broadcast the show or works with local content producers and its showed that more content could be produced and filmed by the Netflix team.

“House of Cards” is a six-season series about the political struggles in Washington, D.C.¹³ “House of Cards” is also the first Netflix original series to be nominated for an Emmy on the web. The original series was well-reputed by critics and fans alike and became a key turning point in Netflix's development. By the end of 2013, Netflix had more than 40 million subscribers. The more content Netflix produces, the more users it attracts. Bringing in higher revenues means more funding for original content providers in a virtuous cycle of growth. In 2014, Netflix continued to expand into Europe. By 2016, the business has expanded to 190 countries and regions around the world, including Taiwan, and also provides programming in 21 languages. As of January 2021, Netflix's streaming service already had 203.7 million subscribers worldwide. After the “Squid Game” was launched on Netflix in September 2021, Netflix's third-quarter financial report showed that it added 4.4 million subscribers, and the increase in subscribers exceeded expectations.¹⁴ Netflix has won numerous awards since it started the projects of producing original content,

¹³ Alexis Coe, "The Very Real History Behind the Crazy Politics of 'House of Cards'," <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/02/the-very-real-history-behind-the-crazy-politics-of-house-of-cards/273370/>.

¹⁴ 中央社, "魷魚遊戲助 netflix 吸金 Q3 新用戶大增 440 萬人," <https://udn.com/news/story/6811/5830972>.

including Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Golden Bell Awards, and more.

A Regional Creative Powerhouse: The Korean Fever and Creative Industries

The Korean culture and creative industries have been building for over two decades. The *Hallyu* or *K-wave* is the rapidly increase in global hits of South Korean culture since the 1990s. Chalmers Johnson¹⁵, an American political scientist, was the first to conceptualize the theory of developmental state. In order to achieve economic development goals, the state intervenes in the economic market. Through the implementation of industrial policy, the private sector is guided and restrained so that the allocation of resources is in line with the country's long-term economic goals. Since the administration of South Korean President Kim Young-sam, the South Korean government has also been committed to promoting the Korean cultural industry.

The revenue from the release of the Hollywood movie Jurassic Park (in 1993) and the release of Avatar (in 2009) is equivalent to the export scale of 1.5 million and 3 million of South Korean cars, respectively, of the movie's release revenue that year.¹⁶ Therefore, the South Korean President Kim Young-sam began to attach importance to the value of cultural and creative industries. In 1998, after the new South Korean President Kim Jong-dae took office, new cultural policies were introduced, such as “The National Government's New Cultural Policy” in 1998, “Cultural Industry Promotion Basic Law” in 1999, it clearly defines national tasks, cultural and creative development goals and policy content. On the other hand, institutions related to the cultural industry were also established in 2001, the highest leading agency of the cultural and creative industries “Korea Cultural and Creative

¹⁵ Chalmers Johnson, *Miti and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy* (Stanford University Press, 1982/06/01).

¹⁶ 河凡植, "政府角色與政企關係：以韓國文創產業發展為例," *台灣國際研究季刊* (2016).

Industry Promotion Agency". Since then, specific support for the cultural industry has been provided, and it has been announced that the budget of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism must be maintained at more than 1% of the total government budget.¹⁷

The Korean government has played a very important role in promoting the cultural and creative industries. The government's role is valued because its measures on reorganizing the policy agency of the "Ministry of Culture", strengthening its driving force for cultural and creative industry policies, and establishing cooperation between the government and the private sector to stimulate, support the cultural and creative industries. Since 1996, in order to protect the domestic film industry in South Korea, the South Korean government has adopted the screen quota system to protect the domestic film industry and restrict foreign films. Theaters are required to show a certain number of hours of Korean films each year to prevent the Korean film industry from collapsing when Korean films competed with foreign films in the Korean market. On the other hand, the state tried to stimulate the output of the domestic film and television industry in South Korea.¹⁸

The Korean government has formulated many policies and preferential measures related to the cultural and creative industries. For example, Korean cultural and creative industry workers can apply to the Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism for assistance in raising relevant entrepreneurial funds. In addition, the Korean government has set up specialized institutions to cultivate talents. For example, the "Cultural and Creative Venture Park" CEL (Creative Economic Leader) was established in December 2015. It is jointly organized by four units of the Korean

¹⁷ Kuo Chiu-wen, "The Policy and Development of Cultural Creative Industry in Korea," 亞洲工藝產業專題

¹⁸ 王雅慧, "韓國發展文化產業軟實力之研究-以韓流為例," (2014).

government: “Creative Economy Promotion Committee”, “Future Technology and Innovation Committee”, “Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism” and KOCCA (Cultural Industry Promotion Academy). The establishment of CEL Academy has given rise to a new generation of creative talents who would increase the competitiveness of cultural and creative industries. ¹⁹The government is determined to make cultural and creative enterprises imperative in maintaining the continuous innovation of the country.

The Influence of Hallyu

Hallyu, the term was first coined by the Chinese media to describe the idol group H.O.T at that time bringing the Korean trend to China. Later, it was generally referred to as the cultural export of South Korea.²⁰

In the 21st century, Korean dramas and K-pop music have become popular in Asia. The Korean dramas such as the historical drama “Dae Jang Geum” in 2003 have achieved widespread global commercial success in Asia. The Korean historical drama “Dae Jang Geum” has created huge economic added value, driving the Korean economy from the licensing of this drama, tourism, and food. It has generated more than 100 million US dollars in global revenue. With the influence of the cultural export of Korean dramas, Korean pop music and idol groups, such as Super Junior's “Sorry Sorry” and Wonder Girls' “Nobody”, have gained high popularity in Asia and became popular songs. With the development of the Internet, Hallyu has a big hit all over the world. In 2017, the Korean group BTS was invited to attend the 2017 American Music Awards, becoming the first Korean group to appear at the American Music Awards.²¹ They even won the Top Social Artist award, beating Justin Bieber's

¹⁹ 丁曉菁, “韓國文創與金融考察心得報告 ” 公視 (2016).

²⁰ KOREA.net, “Hallyu (Korean Wave),” <https://www.korea.net/AboutKorea/Culture-and-the-Arts/Hallyu>.

²¹ Evelyn Lau, “A Timeline of Bts: How the K-Pop Superstars Took over the World,”

6-year record for the award. South Korea has clearly become a powerhouse of cultural export. The success of the Korean cultural and creative industry comes from the two-way cooperation between Creative Power and Culture Technology. Under the trend of the popularization of the Internet, cultural and creative products are produced by combining scientific and technological means, such as editing and dissemination on Internet media platforms. The K-pop music industry drives business through the Internet, such as interacting with fans through social media and informing fans of concert dates to promote ticket-buying opportunities and enhance the influence of the national cultural and creative industry. Before “Squid Game” became Netflix's most-watched drama series, South Korea's cultural and creative industry had already accumulated a certain extent of public awareness of Korean culture.

“Squid Game”: A Netflix Drama

Netflix's most-watched drama “Squid Game” has become the first non-English-language series to win an acting award at the 2022 Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Awards. “Squid Game” actors Lee Jung Jae and Jung Ho Yeon won the Best Actor and Actress awards.²² The series won not only SAG Awards, but also Critics Choice Awards and Satellite Award for Best Television Series – Drama, etc.

“Squid Game” is a Korean original drama series broadcasted by Netflix. The whole story of it was directed and written by director Hwang Dong-ha. The plot is about a group of people who are in debt, need money and are in trouble in their lives. They are invited by a mysterious person to participate in a game. There are a total of 456 players participating in the game, which is the same as Korean childhood games.

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/music/a-timeline-of-bts-how-the-k-pop-superstars-took-over-the-world-1.897514>.

²² "Sag Awards: Coda Wins Top Prize, Squid Game Makes History with Two Acting Awards," <https://www.straitstimes.com/life/entertainment/sag-awards-coda-wins-top-prize-squid-game-makes-history-with-two-acting-awards>.

But the new rule is that the participants are required to win over or kill others in a secret and enclosed location, and the final survivor would win 45.6 billion. So, it is a winner-take-all competition in which participants are urged to win the game by stepping over the others' lives.

The Birth of "Squid Game"

The director of Squid Games started writing the script in 2009, according to his own personal experience. Because in 2008, a film project he participated in failed and owed a lot of debt, he had to rely on his mother's financial support.²³ A year later, he saw a survival comic in a comic store, planned to make a comic-like film and television work, and completed the initial script for the "Squid Game". However, at the time, the script of the "Squid Game" was considered too absurd, bloody and had no commercial value. He also didn't have enough money at the time, so he had to stop the plan first. At first, the director wanted to make the "Squid Game" into a movie. After about a decade, the director was finally able to complete the idea at the time. He showed the script to Netflix, which had recently opened a division in Asia, and they agreed. The film was expanded into a nine- episode series because the director wanted to speak up about social issues. During filming, Netflix gave the director the freedom to create without restrictions. In order to make the actors go through the situation personally, the director created the set realistically and reduced the use of special effects. For example, a game in "Squid Game", the "Glass Steppingstone" game, is a real scene built and shot by the film and television team on a real glass bridge 1.5 meters above the ground. "A mere 1.5 meters can make you frightened. The glass made them nervous. I think we could express the unnoticed rigidity and fear of the

²³ Lucas Shaw, "Hwang Dong-Hyuk, the Brain Behind Squid Game," <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-01/hwang-dong-hyuk-director-behind-netflix-hit-squid-game-bloomberg-50-2021>.

body.” Director Hwang Dong-hyuk explained. “The game was real, and they felt real fear.”²⁴

Social Issues in “Squid Game”

The script of the “Squid Game” reflects many social phenomena that are happening and going through in South Korea and even the whole world. The content of “Squid Game” includes the issue of cruelty under capitalism, the conservative culture of the low status of women in Korean society, and the exploitation of immigrants, etc. Since Covid-19, unemployment has widened, economic activity has been hampered, and South Koreans' demand for loans has skyrocketed. The main reason for the crazy borrowing is soaring real estate prices, and Korean households have to raise debt to buy a house. According to the Bank of Korea, people in their 30s are the most indebted relative to their income, borrowing about 270% of their annual income in total. In “Squid Game”, the game participants are burdened with huge debts and have to participate in the game in order to win a huge amount of money, which also reflects the current debt phenomenon in South Korean society. The director believes it's to the good that “people are discussing these issues and having a lot of conversations.”²⁵ In fact, the director's 2011 work “The Crucible” also triggered changes in Korean society. The plot of this film is adapted from a novel, and the novel is based on a real sexual violence incident in Gwangju, South Korea. Following the box-office success of “The Crucible”, South Koreans have launched an online signature campaign for sexual violence to demand a re-investigation of the sexual violence case. Finally, the police in Gwangju, South Korea set up a task force to re-investigate this case. And the South Korean National Assembly overwhelmingly

²⁴ JOSH ST. CLAIR, "The Creators of Squid Game Reveal How They Brought Each Game to Life," <https://www.menshealth.com/entertainment/a37823252/squid-game-behind-the-scenes/>.

²⁵R.O. KWON, "How Squid Game Turned Rage and Desperation into a Radical Hit," <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2022/05/squid-game-season-2-awards-insider>.

passed the Sexual Assault Prevention Amendment. Director Hwang Dong-hyuk said that the script of the “Squid Game” was considered unrealistic ten years ago, but sadly, the world has now become a world that fits well with the absurd survival story of the “Squid Game”. This is also why “Squid Game” appeared. Director Hwang Dong-hyuk reflects the various social issues that need to be paid attention to and reflect on through the filming of films and dramas.

CHAPTER3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, I use two approaches to collect data. First, I collect and analyze various media documents related to the production and consumption of “Squid Game” and Netflix. Data will be selected from media reports, social media, journal articles and historical texts from Reuters, The Hollywood reporter and BBC, etc. I collected other secondary sources that mainly refer to interview with directors and actors by *New York Magazine*, *The Hollywood reporter* or *The Playlist*, and during the period from September 17th, 2021 to September 17th, 2022. Second, I will draw on in-depth interviews with 10 Netflix subscribers to understand viewers’ experiences.

Interviewing the audience of “Squid game” allowed me to know more detailed viewing ideas on the part of consumption. The interviewees are younger audiences between the ages of 20 and 25 who have their personal ideas of plot, style and the usage of Netflix, etc.

Source of Data

Firstly, I search media coverage on both Squid Game and Netflix. Through media reports, I want to review mediated interviews about the actors and directors of “Squid Game”. The secondary data shows ways of “Squid Game”’s cooperation with Netflix. The second source is I want to collect data is review historical texts, journal articles and social media, such as *Reuters*, *BBC* and *The Hollywood reporter*...etc. The secondary sources of interviews with directors and actors of “Squid game” will be selected from September 17th, 2021 to September 17th, 2022. Besides, I also complete my research through in-depth interviews with 10 Netflix subscribers. The samples of interviewees are between the ages of 20~25. I seek and select eligible

interviewees through “Dcard” because the users of this app are mostly young people. The criteria for me selection of interviewees is that they are between the ages of 20 and 25, who subscribed to Netflix, and watched “Squid game”. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to reduce face to face contact, all in-depth interviews will be conducted through google meet. I will set up an interview time with them by sending Gmail and sending them a google meet link. In addition, the ten interviews will be completed between July and August 2022. The main interview questions are divided into two aspects, the first part is about the usage of Netflix, the second part is talking about the opinion on the plot, production and style of the “Squid Game”, etc.

The following is the information of the interviewees, including interview date and interview time.

	Surname	Gender	Age	Interview Date	Interview Time
No.1	Ku	Female	21	2022.07.07	22:00~22:24
No.2	Yen	Female	21	2022.07.21	21:00~21:55
No.3	Lin	Male	21	2022.07.24	20:56~21:28
No.4	Liu	Female	21	2022.08.04	21:00~21:22
No.5	Lien	Female	25	2022.08.08	20:47~21:03
No.6	Yu	Female	23	2022.08.10	22:02~22:24
No.7	Chiu	Female	24	2022.08.13	22:30~22:44
No.8	Chen	Male	22	2022.08.18	20:00~20:32
No.9	Lee	Female	20	2022.08.19	20:07~20:29
No.10	Lin	Male	25	2022.08.22	21:00~21:30

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Restriction of Netflix

The script for “Squid Game” began as early as 2008 and was completed in 2009. According to *The Playlist*²⁶, a leading film and television website, in an interview with the director of “Squid Game”, one of the interview questions is shown as what follows:

“You first had this idea back in 2008, 2009. What made you (director) persevere and never give up on it?”

“...However, at the time, I knew that it wasn’t fit to become a commercial film for the cinema or a TV series on linear channels, because there were a lot of limitations, whether it was the violence that is depicted or the viewer rating. And so, I felt like, considering the media environment back then, it just wasn’t the right time. It would be pushing it a bit too much if I wanted to create it into a linear TV series or a film for the cinema. I think I felt like the story was ahead of our time at that time, and I always had this thought that maybe someday when the time comes, when time goes by and times change, maybe this story, this item will be responded to in a different way...”²⁷ (reply of the director *Hwang Dong-hyuk*)-

And the other interview question of *The playlist* is like: “*Was there any specific moment that made you take it off your shelf and pitch it?*” In the response, he also explained in what is extracted:

- “...So around 2018, I read it for the first time in 10 years again, because I was thinking about doing a webtoon with it. At the time, Netflix was just beginning its business in Korea, and it was a time

²⁶ Gregory Ellwood, “‘Squid Game’ Creator Hwang Dong-Hyuk Visualized the Show for over a Decade [Interview],” <https://theplaylist.net/squid-game-creator-hwang-dong-hyuk-visualized-the-show-for-over-a-decade-interview-20220505/>.

²⁷ “‘Squid Game’ Creator Hwang Dong-Hyuk Visualized the Show for over a Decade [Interview],” <https://theplaylist.net/squid-game-creator-hwang-dong-hyuk-visualized-the-show-for-over-a-decade-interview-20220505/>.

when global OTT services were really becoming very popular. And I thought if we were to look at just the Korean market, there would be a lot of limitations, but maybe with the global OTT and to showcase this story to a global audience, that could be a good bet, and I thought it could also lead to greater opportunities. So maybe, just maybe Netflix could be a good home for “Squid Game”.”

Based on these two questions and answers of *The Playlist*, Netflix has less restrictions on original dramas and gives creators more room for writing, scripting and shooting, etc. Netflix has repeatedly emphasized giving creators complete freedom of creative. For example, Reed Hastings, Netflix CEO, has mentioned that more than once, *“To them, the creativity of creators is more important than the information provided by the data.”*²⁸ *“Netflix offered total creative control of the production,”* says CEO and co-founder Modi Wiczysk of Media Rights Capital, the production company of “House of Cards Season 1”.²⁹ Besides, Sandra Bullock, Oscar winner, has worked with Netflix on films and series including “Bird Box” and “The Unforgivable”. She has also said that she likes the greater creative freedom and independence of working with Netflix.³⁰ Netflix offered cultural workers pursue freedom of production. In addition, Netflix is one of the most popular OTT platforms in the world. Cooperating with Netflix to play “Squid Game” on this platform can attract more global audiences.

Coming out

“Squid game” was released worldwide on Netflix on September 17th, 2021. It’s coming out was a good timing contributing to the popularity of this series, as shown

²⁸ 何佩珊, “打破數據創作迷思, 給創作者自由才是王道,”

<https://www.bnext.com.tw/article/48488/netflix-believe-creators-mind-important-than-data>.

²⁹ ROBERTO BALDWIN, “With House of Cards, Netflix Bets on Creative Freedom,”

<https://www.wired.com/2013/02/creative-freedom-cord-cutting/>.

³⁰ MATTHEW BIGGIN, “Sandra Bullock Says Working with Netflix Gives Her More Freedom,”

<https://screenrant.com/sandra-bullock-netflix-partnership-explained-benefits-freedom/>.

in a quote below from my interviewee No.4:

“Because of the different ages, you may only be able to watch “As the Gods Will” when it broadcasted on TV. Smartphones may not be so popular at that time, but now we have Netflix, and friends may ask each other if they want to subscribe together.”

- “*As the Gods Will*” is a Japanese horror movie in 2014, and it was released in Taiwan on May 15, 2015. The content and theme are also related to survival games. Although the box office of “As the Gods Will” grossed \$1,938,654 worldwide, the popularity still has a gap with “Squid game”.³¹

In Chapter 1, I already mentioned, “Squid Game” reached a staggering 1.65 billion hours viewing in the 28 days following its September 17th premiere. And “Squid Game” is even officially Netflix’s most watched show or film ever. In 2015, Netflix had not yet entered Taiwan at that time, nor had it spread globally. The release time of “Squid game” is compared with the content of Netflix in 2015, which has added more subscribers and with more series and movies in more countries. “Squid game” can be watched as long as you subscribe to Netflix. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the convenience offered by OTT platforms makes it easy to sell services to people who like to consume content online. It also means the release time of “Squid game” is easier to watch than “As the Gods Will”.

According to my interviewee No.7:

“Because the release time seems to be the summer vacation of college students or a new semester has just started, but like the release of “Light the Night”, it was just stuck in my midterm or final exams, so I didn’t finish it.”

The age restriction of “Squid game” on Netflix is TV-MA. TV-MA means for

³¹ IMDbPro, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl1066959873/weekend/>.

mature audiences only, TV Guidelines indicates “this program is specifically designed to be viewed by adults. Therefore, it might be unsuitable for children under 17 years old. This program may contain one or more of the following: crude indecent language, explicit sexual activity, or graphic violence.”³² In fact, college students are old enough to watch “Squid game”, and college students are likely to spend more time than others to watch Netflix during the summer vacation.

The extract of my interviewee No.9 shows how college students might be big fan of the work on Netflix.

“Sometimes I do not have much time to watch Netflix because I have to go to school, maybe an hour at most, but like summer vacation, I spend six or seven hours on Netflix if I have nothing to do.”

The release time of “Squid game” may be just when college students have free time to watch it. And students recommend watching and discussing the plot with each other, which will snowball the feedbacks to increase the number of “Squid game” viewers.

Interviewee No.8 suggests,

“One reason is also because of the rise of streaming platforms and the outbreak of the epidemic, which will drive some viewers.”

Coronavirus started in 2019 and broke out all over the world in early 2020. At the beginning of the epidemic, governments around the world announced to reduce non-essential going out and stay at home to reduce the chance of infection and implement quarantine policies for infected people. During the pandemic, people were

³² Kait Hanson, "Is 'Squid Game' on Netflix Appropriate for Kids to Watch?," <https://news.yahoo.com/squid-game-netflix-appropriate-kids-201252867.html>.

staying at home longer which also drives the “stay-at-home economy”, Netflix is a good example. According to *Reuters*, top three multimedia news agencies in the world, providing a variety of news and financial data, one of reports indicated Netflix rode a roller coaster during the pandemic, with steep growth early in 2020 when people were staying home and movie theaters were closed, followed by a slowdown in 2021. Netflix picked up more than 36 million customers in 2020, and 18.2 million in 2021.³³ Although the number of subscriptions in 2021 slow down compared to 2020, after the broadcast of the “Squid game”, the number of subscriptions still exceeds expectations. As I already mentioned in Chapter 2, after the “Squid Game” was launched on Netflix in September 2021, Netflix’s third-quarter financial report showed that it added 4.4 million subscribers, and the increase in subscribers exceeded expectations. Subscriber growth of 4.4 million in the third quarter of 2021 beat expectations of 3.84 million.³⁴ The release time of the “Squid game” coincided with the showing time when the global epidemic was still spreading. Consumers have greatly reduced their outdoors activities of consumption due to the epidemic so that subscribing Netflix created a new form of entertainment at home.

Interviewee No.1 mentioned that,

“Squid games have also boosted Netflix subscriptions, because only the highest quality and genuine ones can be seen on Netflix.”

Therefore, the release of “Squid game” not only brought another wave of subscriptions to Netflix, but also increased entertainment to viewers who stayed at home due to the epidemic.

³³ Lisa Richwine, "Gloomy Netflix Forecast Erases Much of Stock's Pandemic Gains," <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/netflix-misses-subscriber-addition-estimates-pandemic-pull-eases-competition-2022-01-20/>.

³⁴ Jessica Bursztynsky, "Netflix Posts Solid Beats on Earnings and New Subscribers," <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/10/19/netflix-nflx-q3-2021-earnings.html>.

Top 10 on Netflix

Netflix changed the rules of the ranking chart in November 2021. In the past, Netflix is ranked by the numbers of viewers per title and based on two minutes watched within 28 days of its release. The new ranking is based on total number of hours a series or movie watched.³⁵ However, “Squid Game” was still a massive success on the platform. According to *Bloomberg* reported, Netflix estimates that 89% of people who started the show watched at least 75 minutes (more than one episode) and 66% of viewers, or 87 million people, have finished the series in the first 23 days.³⁶ Even if the ranking rules are changed, it will not affect the popularity of “Squid game”. All of my interviewees said that when choosing a series or movie, they will refer to the ranking or recommendations of Netflix. Below is two similar remarks of interviewee No.1 and No. 10, respectively:

“Even some of Netflix subscribers who don't use social media, the ranking or recommendation of Netflix should be attracted them to watch.”

“Because “Squid game” appears on the ranking chart, no matter what type of series or movies that person usually views, if he (or she) is curious, he (or she) may click to watch it, and the reach rate will be higher.”

Both of the interviewees talked about a series or movies on the rankings of Netflix that would drive more viewers. As long as the series or movie can reach the TOP 10 of Netflix, it is also equivalent to getting free publicity. For viewers, the ranking of Netflix allows them to watch fresh topics of series or movies and know what series or movies are popular recently to increase common topics with friends.

³⁵ CATIE KECK, "Netflix Is Shifting the Way It Ranks Its Most Popular Titles," <https://www.theverge.com/2021/10/19/22735379/netflix-changing-ranking-metric-popular-titles-hours-viewed>.

³⁶ Lucas Shaw, "Netflix Estimates 'Squid Game' Will Be Worth Almost \$900 Million," <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-17/squid-game-season-2-series-worth-900-million-to-netflix-so-far?sref=P6Q0mxvj>.

For a series or film production team, it may be possible to increase production costs when shooting new productions in the future. For Netflix, it may also increase the growth of new subscribers who want to watch Netflix's exclusive series or movies out of curiosity. The ranking of Netflix is a very useful function for Netflix users.

Trending

Since "Squid Game" was released on Netflix, it has been widely disseminated on social media and reported by the global media. Reports related to "Squid game" can be seen in both traditional media and new media, such as the news of "Squid game" broadcast on traditional TV, the meme of "Squid game" on social media, like Instagram, Twitter or Facebook, etc. When I asked the interviewees one of the interview questions, "*What is the motivation for watching "Squid game"?*" Four of the ten interviewees mentioned about because the discussion on social media and media coverage leading them to watch "Squid game". According to "the herding effect", also known as "the bandwagon effect", mentioned in psychology, when people do something because everyone else is doing it. The bandwagon effect can spread quickly and on a large-scale through a positive feedback loop, whereby the more people are affected by it, the more likely other people are to be affected by it too.³⁷ Nowadays, because of the development of Internet technology, people receive information faster through new media. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, new media usually refers to the use of digital technology, network technology and other modern information technology, and it is not limited by space and time. Through new media, such as media coverages or the discussions on social media, the bandwagon effect is more pronounced, from two individuals to society as a whole. In addition, I found the interviewees mentioned other reason of the motivation to watch "Squid game", seven

³⁷ Itamar Shatz. PhD, "The Bandwagon Effect: Why People Tend to Follow the Crowd," *Effectiviology*.

of the ten interviewees said that “*Because it was recommended by my friends*”, “*Because I want to discuss “Squid game” with my friends*” or similar words. The bandwagon effect also influenced by normative social influence, which means acting in order to fit into the group or to gain the approval from others.³⁸ Therefore, “Squid game” achieve the bandwagon effect through mass communication, which leads to the continuous growth of followers, which is also one of the reasons for its popularity.

Discussion on Social Issues

In the past, Korean dramas audiences had an established impression of Korean dramas was romantic comedies. Two of my interviewees mentioned their impression about Korean drama, and they have different opinions on Korean dramas now.

Interviewee No.2 mentioned:

“In the past, Korean dramas were mainly discuss about love, but “Squid game” involves some social issues, such as capitalism, someone challenged somethings impossible in order to get money.”

And interviewee No.4 said:

“Korean dramas are usually romantic, but “Squid game” changed my outlook on Korean dramas because I don't usually watch Korean dramas, but this kind of subject is quite interesting to everyone.”

In fact, the plot of Korean dramas is increasingly talking about social issues. Such as “Juvenile Justice”, a Korean show, which on TOP 10 of Netflix in Taiwan, focus on minors and their relationship to crime and punishment that deals with some of the most unpleasant and morally uncomfortable ideas in society. The director pointed out that he intended for the story to provide full and unbiased views of the issues.³⁹ The issue is not only “Juvenile Justice”, but also other Korean dramas of

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Lee Gyu-lee, "Kim Hye-Soo's New Netflix Series 'Juvenile Justice' to Touch on Young Offenders'

Netflix associated with social issues, such as “Extraordinary Attorney Woo” and “Our Blues Time”, etc., have all been on TOP10 of Netflix in Taiwan. However, “Squid game” is no exception.

According to *The Hollywood report*⁴⁰, an American digital and physical print magazine and website, interviewed the main actor of “Squid game”, and one of the interview questions mentioned

“Why do you think it became such a worldwide sensation?”

“When we look at the economic gap that’s only continuing to worsen all around the world, I believe that many people have either been feeling or have felt that this was a very real and huge issue. And because of that, I believe Squid Game’s message resonated with so many people around the world.” Answered by the actor Lee Jung-Jae.

And when the director mentioned in another interview with *New York Magazine*⁴¹, he said that “...*I also think viewers around the world deeply relate to the theme of economic inequality and the problems of modern capitalism, especially in times of a global pandemic.*”

“Squid game” shows many of the inequalities social issues faced real life in South Korea even around the world, including the gap between the rich and the poor and immigrants are exploited, etc. According to *QUARTZ*, in 2009, only 45.4% of the world's people owned 1% of the world's wealth, but in 2016 have increased to 50.8%.⁴² The “*Global Inequality Report*” released at the end of 2021 by Thomas

Issues,” https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2022/07/688_324370.html.

⁴⁰ BEATRICE VERHOEVEN, “‘Squid Game’ Director Hwang Dong-Hyuk, Star Lee Jung-Jae on Lasting Impact of Show: “Great Stories Can Come from Anywhere”,” <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-features/squid-game-director-lee-jung-jae-series-impact-1235158390/>.

⁴¹ Regina Kim, “Squid Game Creator Hwang Dong-Hyuk Answers All Our Lingering Questions on “Gganbu,” Ali, and How He Lost Six Teeth During Production.” (2021/11/30).

⁴² 魯皓平, “貧富差距多誇張？老闆所得大到你無法想像！,” <https://www.gvm.com.tw/article/35760>.

Piketty, a French socialist economist indicated that the richest 10% of the world's population own 76% of the world's wealth, and nearly 50% of the population own only 2% of the wealth.⁴³ As I already mentioned in Chapter 2, the script was completed in 2009. And the script of the “Squid Game” was considered too absurd, bloody and had no commercial value at that time. But with the passage of time, the script of “Squid game” seemed so unrealistic at the time, it no longer felt unrealistic anymore. The phenomenon of the gap between the rich and the poor mentioned in the plot of “Squid game” has become more severe and pronounced over the world. Especially during the COVID-19, it caused an increase in unemployment. It resonates more easily with global audiences about the growing disparity between rich and poor under capitalism.

In addition to mention the issue of capitalism, the character “Ali” in this series also makes us reflect on the issue of discrimination and exploitation of migrant workers in various countries. The character “Ali” in “Squid game” is a Pakistani migrant worker who joins the game in order to support his family after his boss withheld his salary for six months. One of the interview questions mentioned by *New York Magazine*, “Can you talk about the creation of Ali’s character?”

“...Through Ali, I wanted to show viewers that migrant workers are just like any of us. They might even be working more desperately to be recognized and survive in Korea. Every advanced country in the world today is sustained by the sacrifice and dedication of migrant workers. In addition, the influx of refugees is a huge social issue in Europe and North America. I created Ali to point viewers to issues we all need to reflect upon.”⁴⁴ the “Squid game” director answered.

The problem of discrimination and exploitation of migrant workers is not only

⁴³ 黃維萱, “《全球不平等報告》: 半數人口只擁有 2% 財富——社會創新如何協助降低貧富差距?”, <https://www.seinsights.asia/specialfeature/8513/8517>.

⁴⁴ Kim, “Squid Game Creator Hwang Dong-Hyuk Answers All Our Lingering Questions on “Gganbu,” Ali, and How He Lost Six Teeth During Production..”

in Korea, but also occurs all over the world. They may be discriminated against because of skin color, from an economically disadvantaged country, different living habits, or for other reasons. Since 1990, the Taiwanese government has opened up domestic employers to legally introduce migrant workers to undertake various labor-intensive jobs, including farmland work, factory work, and care work for families and social welfare institutions. In February 2022, the total number of migrant workers in Taiwan has exceeded 660,000.⁴⁵ However, discrimination against foreign migrant workers is still emerging, and the problem of discrimination has even been exacerbated during the epidemic. For example, in June 2021, due to the aggravation of the epidemic caused by the cluster infection of migrant workers at the Miaoli Electronics Factory, the Mayor of Miaoli issued an order to impose a "Foot restraint" on migrant workers from Southeast Asia in Miaoli. He said that the order was issued to prevent migrant workers from contacting residents and gathering in groups. However, at the same time, Taiwanese were still free to go out. It sparked a "racial discrimination" controversy.⁴⁶ Through the role of "Ali" in the "Squid game", the audience can also reflect on the issues of discrimination and exploitation of migrant workers. Migrant workers are no different from us and should be treated fairly like us.

Interviewee No.9 mentioned social issues about organ trade in "Squid game":

- "The organ trade in this series is like the current events in Cambodia. I used to think that these events were far away from me, but now these people who have been deceived in Cambodia are probably scammed by their relatives and friends, which is very close to reality."

Some people may be deceived leading to their organs removed by organ trade

⁴⁵ 江婉琦, "【投書】張正、陳翰堂、陳秀蓮：偏見與歧視真的能被扭轉嗎？移工權益倡議經驗分享," <https://www.civilmedia.tw/archives/110021>.

⁴⁶ 監察院, "移工在疫情中遭到歧視的差別待遇，監察院通過糾正苗栗縣政府對移工的禁足令," (2022/07/28).

industry or because of poverty, they need to make money through organ trading. The organ trade industry has been valued annually at \$840 million to \$1.7 billion by Global Financial Integrity.⁴⁷ This high value is a result of a global organ donations shortage. The Global Observatory on Donation and Transplantation estimates that organ transplants account for less than 10% of the global need.⁴⁸ This high demand coupled with a global shortage of available organs has resulted in high prices on the black market. In today's globalized economy, it's not just the labor force of the poor that sells, but the body itself. Organ trade has become a global problem, even though it is banned in almost every country in the world, this trend is still persisted.

“Squid game” points out many of the various social issues that are taking place in the world, including capitalism, organ trafficking, discrimination against migrant workers, and more. This series resonated with audiences, and likewise, made the audience reflect on and discuss various injustices in real life. “Squid game” seems bloody and violent, but some of the plot in this series subtly coincides with what happens or sees in our real life. Discussion on social issues is one of the reasons why “Squid game” are popular.

No-brainer

The plot of “Squid game” sets total 456 players to challenge Korean childhood games. Since it is a childhood game, the rules of these games are very simple and easy to understand. And as I mentioned in Chapter 2, the final winner could get 45.6 billion won, but once they lost the game, the price was death.

According to an interview with *New York Magazine*, the director of “Squid game” said:

⁴⁷ Abby Leonard, "Organ Trafficking: The Squid Game Choice," <https://humantraffickingsearch.org/organ-trafficking-the-squid-game-choice/>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

“...I prioritized games that are the simplest to play, that have simple rules and are easy for anyone in the world to understand; the simpler the game was, the bigger the contrast against what’s at stake — which would create more irony and greater tension...”⁴⁹

The games set in the “Squid game” are simple and easy to understand, so that the global audience does not need to spend too much brainpower to understand the rules of the game and they can focus on the excitement created by the story itself. Let the audience feel the mood, the twist and emotional transitions between the characters. A simple childhood game is about life and death. Four of my interviewees mentioned about that they think this theme is very contrasting and ironic because life and death are determined by childhood games. The easy-to-understand childhood game and story, paired with colorful scene designs, contrast with every drop of blood in this show.

These childhood games in the story of “Squid game” can actually be played in real life, as long as the props are accessible and not dangerous. For example, the glass bridge section in the plot is more difficult to imitate and dangerous. But almost these games in “Squid game” are easy to play in our life.

Interviewee No.5 said,

“If someone wants to imitate the games in real life, it is actually very simple. For example, our company has played the game of “Honeycomb” before, so the operation can be reproduced in real life.”

The game of “Honeycomb” in the “Squid game”, the players selected a variety of different shapes and patterns of Honeycomb candy, and they need to cut out the whole shape within a limited time. As long as the pattern of the Honeycomb candy is broken or timed out, the players will die. Even this game has led to a boom in

⁴⁹ Kim, "Squid Game Creator Hwang Dong-Hyuk Answers All Our Lingering Questions on “Gganbu,” Ali, and How He Lost Six Teeth During Production..”

business opportunities. For example, “Café Squid Game” opened a two-day pop-up in Paris in mid-October 2021. The coffee shop provides customers with four shapes of Honeycomb candy. If customers can cut out the complete shape of the Honeycomb candy for a limited time, they can get a free month of Netflix viewing.⁵⁰ And “Jingying Hotel”, one of the hotels in Tainan, launched the Biscuit Iron box “I am Jingying No. 457”. Those who successfully cut out one of the shapes of Honeycomb candy will have the opportunity to stay at the “Jingying Hotel” or “Just Sleep” for one night each for free.⁵¹ These are the reasons why “Squid game” are more discussed. Even viewers who haven't seen “Squid Game” may also know about “Squid Game” through these activities, and the game is easy to understand without much explanation.

Right control on episodes

As I already mentioned in Chapter 2, the Korean culture and creative industries have been building for over two decades. The Hallyu or K-wave is the rapidly increase in global hits of South Korean culture since the 1990s. A Korean drama usually consist of sixteen episodes, update about two episodes a week, and an episode is about an hour. This is to match the plot twists and turns, in the TV era, because of the considerations for ratings, sixteen episodes are just the right length.⁵² But “Squid game” have only nine episodes. *New York Magazine* interviewed the director of “Squid game”, below is one of the interview questions:

“Is there a particular reason there are only nine episodes in Squid

⁵⁰ 陳慶德, “〈魷魚遊戲〉掀起的全球四大「斜槓效益」”, <https://www.gvm.com.tw/article/83305>.

⁵¹ 羅玉如, “晶英餅乾鐵盒 挑戰台版魷魚遊戲”, <https://www.cdns.com.tw/articles/466407>.

⁵² SYLVIA CHENG, “韓國演藝圈很血汗？主角靠人氣和背後勢力？親身解密韓劇迷不知道的 7 大產業秘辛！”, <https://www.elle.com/tw/entertainment/gossip/g36486491/secrets-of-korean-showbiz/>.

Game since most K-dramas have more episodes than that?”⁵³

“It was initially written in eight episodes, but the last episode turned out to be longer than I envisioned after editing, so I had to divide it into two. While most Korean dramas consist of 16 episodes, Netflix series generally consist of six to eight episodes, which I think is the right length for a story that maintains its tension to the end.” (the director)

“Squid game” has fewer episodes than most of the previous Korean dramas. If this series are as long as sixteen episodes, like previous Korean dramas, the plot might drag too long, and the patience of the audience will wear off. Only nine episodes are just the right length for “Squid game”, each episode of this series is about 32 to 63 minutes long. The eighth episode is only about half an hour even.

My interviewee No.6 mentioned one of the reasons for watching “Squid game” is “...*the number of episodes in this series is quite small, the trailer is attractive, so I'd like to watch it first, because I can finish it in a day or two.*” “Squid Game” released all of the episodes on Netflix at once. Because of the small number of episodes and the compact plot, it will attract the viewers who have more free time to watch it at once.

Both of Interviewee No.5 and No.10 mentioned about that “*the first episode of a series is very important for them.*” If the first episode of a series didn't appeal to them, they would not keep viewing. Interviewee No.8 also said that “*The plot is better to get straight to the point and I'd like to watch more.*” The first episode of “Squid game” allowed the viewers to see the first dead childhood game “One Two Three... Freeze”, as long as any player moved, the player would be shot by a machine. The first episode of “Squid game” created a tense atmosphere, making the

⁵³ Kim, "Squid Game Creator Hwang Dong-Hyuk Answers All Our Lingering Questions on “Gganbu,” Ali, and How He Lost Six Teeth During Production..”

viewers nervous for the 456 players and want to keep watching who the winner would be. About “Squid game”, interviewee No.8 also mentioned “*The pacing of the series is so well-controlled that the plot barely feels dragged.*” The tense and exciting plot of “Squid game” will arouse the curiosity of the viewers and continue to watch. The control over the arrangement of the plot and the length of the episodes are also the reasons why “Squid game” are popular all over the world.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSOIN

In recent years, due to the impact of COVID-19, one can see the rise of cultural economy throughout the world, like OTT subscribers have risen rapidly. The overall share of TV in our daily media activity has declined, and OTT media services like Netflix are taking an increasing share of our TV viewing time. The convenience offered by OTT platforms makes it easy to sell services to people who want to consume content online.

Netflix is a good platform to consume content online. It has a global audience, and its platform serves more than 190 regions and countries. Besides, Netflix is not only a “Content Provider” but also a “Content Production” for its own platform. From “House of Cards” to “Squid Game”, the Netflix original shows spark a buzz surrounding the world. According to Netflix, “Squid Game” reached a staggering 1.65 billion hours viewing in the 28 days following its September 17 premiere. “Squid game” became the *Most Viewed Original Series* on Netflix.

In this study, I have collected various information from historical texts and media related to Netflix and “Squid game”. In addition, I collected, organized and analyzed their thoughts through in-depth interview with Netflix subscribers who watched “Squid game”. Furthermore, the secondary source of interview data with the director and actors of “Squid game” are also the important source for me to find the answers to research questions.

The interviews with the director and actors of the “Squid game” can only be collected through secondary sources of preceding interview data within media. But luckily, these sources are sufficient and useful for me to do this research and analyze the results. In addition, it may be difficult to in-depth interview with the wider samples, so I just focus on young people between 20 to 25 years old.

After doing data analysis, I got three findings for my leading question, and four findings for my related question. Below of the insights and results of my analysis.

Leading Question: **What is the role of Netflix in the success of “Squid game”?**

1. Freedom room for cultural worker

Netflix has less restrictions on the production of original dramas and gives creators a lot of freedom for writing, scripting and shooting, etc. Netflix offered cultural workers pursue freedom of production.

2. The decision maker of right time for release

First, the convenience offered by OTT platforms makes it easy to sell services to people who want to consume content online. The release time of “Squid game” is easier to watch than the release time of similar theme of “As the Gods Will”. Second, college students are old enough to watch “Squid game”. The release time happens to be the time when college students generally have more free time to watch. Last, the release time of the “Squid game” coincided with the time when the global epidemic was still spreading. Consumers have reduced their consumption when going out due to the epidemic and subscribed to Netflix in the hope of having more and better entertainment at home. Recreation time at home got longer.

3. Advertiser

As long as the series or movie can reach the TOP 10 of Netflix, it is also equivalent to getting free publicity. For viewers, the ranking of Netflix allows them to watch fresh topics of series or movies and know what series or movies are popular recently to increase common topics with friends. The series or movie on the TOP 10 of Netflix may arouse viewers' curiosity and click to view to increase the viewing hours.

Related Question: **Why is “Squid Game” so popular around the world?**

1. Media coverage and the discussion on social media

Reports related to “Squid game” can be seen in both traditional media and new media, such as the news of “Squid game” broadcast on traditional TV, the meme of “Squid game” on social media, like Instagram, Twitter or Facebook, etc. “Squid game” shows the bandwagon effect through mass communication, which leads to the continuous growth of followers.

2. Discussion on social issues

“Squid game” shows many of the various social issues that are taking place in the world, including capitalism, organ trafficking and discrimination against migrant workers, etc. Because social issues were pointed out in the series, it resonated with audiences.

3. Simple and easy plot for global viewers to understand

The games set in the “Squid game” are simple and easy to understand, so that the global audience does not need to spend too much brainpower to understand the rules of the game and they can focus on the excitement created by the story itself. The child games can also be imitated easily in real life.

4. The series has only nine episodes

The length of the episodes is well controlling the tense and exciting plot of “Squid game”. It arouses the curiosity of the viewers and continue to watch.

To sum up, the Korean culture and creative industries have been building for over two decades, and it has a good script that can resonate with global viewers in the modern era. Moreover, with the rise of cultural economy of Netflix, the benefits that have swept the world have been multiplied by each other.

APPENDIX

論文題目：

The Rise of Cultural Economy on Netflix: A Study of A Successful Story of Squid Game

訪談主題：

調查 Netflix 訂閱者對於 Netflix 的使用狀況及探討 Netflix 訂閱者對於原創影集魷魚遊戲(劇情、風格、製作)的想法

主要訪談面向：

(1) Netflix 使用狀況

(2) 魷魚遊戲(劇情、風格、製作)的想法

訪談大綱

第一部分：

使用狀況

1. 請問您訂閱 Netflix 多長時間了？
2. 訂閱 Netflix 的動機為何？
3. 您通常一天大約花多少時間在 Netflix 上？
4. 通常在 Netflix 上會如何選擇您想觀看的影集？

第二部分：

1. 請問您何時開始觀看魷魚遊戲的？
2. 觀看魷魚遊戲的動機為何？
3. 對於魷魚遊戲的劇情有什麼想法嗎？有看見想探討什麼嗎？
4. 最有印象的部分是？

5. 對於魷魚遊戲拍攝畫面的風格有吸引到你嗎?
6. 您覺得魷魚遊戲成功的因素是什麼?
7. 有其他想補充關於這部劇的任何想法嗎?

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